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ABSTRACT

Teaching approaches for adult English as second language students with little previous formal education or native language literacy cannot rely on the traditional written materials. For students who cannot be reached through the written word, approaches must be devised that engage other channels of perceptions. Classroom activities are suggested that tap into the sensory systems of the students, including the kinesthetic, visual, auditory, gustatory, and olfactory. Multisensory presentations should be used so that each student can benefit from his or her preferred modality. The suggested activities focus on unfinished pictures, cartoons, fashion shows, sound effects, records, paralanguage, sampling of native foods, and sampling and discussion of the smells of spices. (RW)

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MULTI-SENSORY INPUT IN THE NON-ACADEMIC ESL CLASSROOM

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Traditional approaches to second language teaching have relied heavily on the use of the written word as the vehicle for input and output and have emphasized analysis of grammatical and structural properties of the target language. More and more teachers of adult school ESL are currently finding themselves faced with large classes of students with very little formal schooling experience in their native countries. Often, these students neither read nor write in their native language. Indeed, often they come from a language background which has no written form! Obviously, new approaches must be devised to reach these learners when books and exercise pages are not suitable to their skills level. Where, then, can we begin?

This paper explores the need for engaging all channels of perception of our new students in their learning process -- eyes, ears, bodies, hands -- even their sense of taste and smell. Each one of our sensory input channels is a means toward learning and organizing our world. How can we take advantage of these innate resources? Through media such as pictures, cards, charts, posters, tapes, music, Total Physical Response, Live Action, real objects, chants, etc., the possibilities for reaching each and every individual in our classrooms are endless.

Ideas are shared here for classroom activities that tap into the sensory systems of our students. They are given with the sole intention of stimulating further creativity on the part of the teacher for developing an added dimension to the ESL syllabus for non-academic students.

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Traditionally, our ESL students have learned their second language for the most part through the printed word. Our instruction is often reduced to, "Open your book to page 23..... take your workbooks and write the answers on part C.....fill in the blanks.....finish the sentences.....write this passage in the past perfect tense, etc..." Now we realize that this is not always the most creative or effective manner to teach a language, but it certainly is time saving and easy. And besides, our students are accustomed to these types of classroom activities. They feel comfortable with their pencil and dictionary in their hands. Or do they?

Now we are facing a new dilemma. What do we do when we are faced with a classroom of 40 or more learners who don't even know the Roman alphabet or the sound/symbol relationships of English? Even more puzzling, where do we begin when our students are illiterate in their native language -- or better yet, when they come from a language tradition that has no written form at all?

Our immigrant and refugee students have immediate needs to communicate. Their survival depends on it. We must help them to listen and understand as soon as possible. They must begin to listen and understand as soon as possible. They must begin to express their personal needs and feelings long before their analytic ability or literacy skills are developed enough to assist them. How do we reach them?

One possible perspective that I would like to suggest is to create your lessons to appeal to every sensory input channel that your students possess. They cannot read or write (many don't even realize there is a need for it!) but they can see, hear, smell and, taste. Each of us as human beings makes contact with and experiences the known and the unknown through our five senses. Each one of our sensory input channels is a

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This article is based on a two-hour workshop presented at CATESOL '81 in Monterey, California, and Ontario TESL, Canada, '81.

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vehicle that guides us through an ongoing stream of information which we use to organize our experiences and learn about our world.

We all differ widely in the intensity of our various sensory experiences and this is the basis for my suggestion that we develop simple multi-sensory presentations for our non-academic students. I feel that in this way, we are more assured of reaching each and every learner through his/her primary representational system. John Grinder and Richard Bandler, in their work on neurolinguistics, have posited that some learners have a "rich, highly developed visual representational system..... others have a refined, highly developed kinesthetic representational system. And so on with the other possible ways associated with our five senses that we have of representing our experiences" (Grinder/Bandler). If this is so, and my intuition plus empirical evidence from my classroom tell me that it is, our students' responses and the ease of their learning could be individually contingent upon which individual sensory input channel is the most highly valued or highly developed by each student. Does that mean that if we are relying on visual aids 95% of the time in our classroom presentations, is it possible that we are not reaching the "auditories" or the "kinesthetics" in our class in the most effective manner? Possibly. And definitely it's something at least to consider when designing our lessons.

The remainder of this paper will deal with several classroom activities designed to tap into the various sensory systems of your non-academic students. For the most part, they are suitable for entry level to low intermediate students -- those students who have a current focus on understanding and speaking while they are concurrently in the process of developing their writing/phonic skills. The activities I offer are not all new, but maybe you haven't experimented with them yet and would like some fresh ideas.

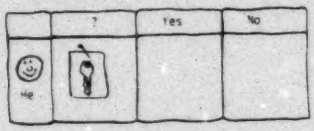
VISUALS

I am assuming that you already use hand-held pictures, flashcards, charts and posters, and stick figures of some sort scribbled on your blackboard. These are basic to any language learning classroom, no matter what the level. I will not go into the how-to's or wherefores of these materials here.

Grids - One interesting way to present and practice grammar items, specifically verb tense, number, affirmative and negative forms, too, either, and contrasts with but, is to take known vocabulary items and manipulate them within a matrix or grid chart to elicit correct responses. Grids require minimal written words. Figure 1 shows a basic grid that you might use at an initial presentation. (I will use the verb have to illustrate the procedure, but

any verb can be practiced on a grid.)

Figure 1.



Shown:
"Does he have a key?"

Taking a stack of pictures of common objects, hold them one at a time in the square under the question mark. With each picture, model "Does he have a car?" "Does he have a watch?" "Does he have a son?" After they have listened and internalized the sound and sight correlation, do a traditional choral repetition exercise so that they may practice. Do the same with the negative and the affirmative form, using the pictures again as cues for the substitutions and the grid as a cue for the grammar form. In response to your picture placement on the grid, the students will be forming sentences such as, "Does he have an old bicycle?" "No, he doesn't." "He has an old car."

Later in the week or the next day you could present the same type of chart but practice the first person. "Do you have $5.00?" "No, I don't." "I have 5¢." Whenever your students are ready, you can design a two row chart, (Figure 2) to practice the contrasts between first and third person, and add the concept of too, either, and but. Depending on your sequencing of the vocabulary cards within the grid, you will be cueing such utterances as:

"He has an old bicycle and I have an old bicycle, too!"

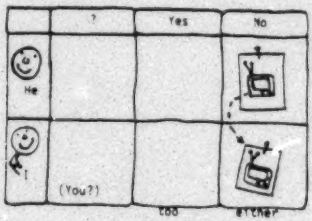
"He doesn't have money. I don't either."

"He has a son, but he doesn't have a daughter."

"He has new shoes, but I don't"

"I have 2 girlfriends, but he has 6 girlfriends."

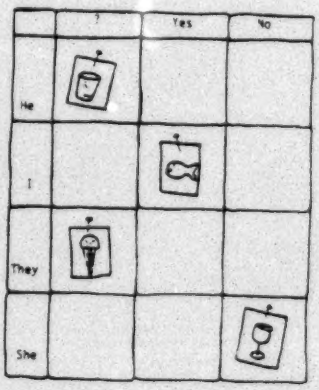
Figure 2.



Shown:
"He doesn't have a T.V. and I don't either."

All of this language is cued only by pictures held to the appropriate square on the grid in conjunction with a lot of exaggerated tonality or body language by the teacher for emphasis. By adding rows to the grid one step at a time, you will eventually end up with a 12 square pattern-practice chart. (Any more than that seems to be too many to keep track of!) (Figure 3.)

Figure 3.



Shown:
"Does he like milk?"
"I like fish."
"Do they like icecream?"
"She doesn't like wine."

Unfinished pictures

Another way in which to take advantage of your students' visual resources is to have them complete unfinished pictures using their imagination. Give them copies of an unfinished picture which you have drawn (or see bibliography - Cazet) and a handful of color crayons. Show them that the picture can be turned or held in any position until they have just the angle they like. Assure them that you don't know what the picture is either -- each individual must decide. Give them about ten minutes to complete their drawing. If they can write at all, ask them to label or title their creations (help them with spelling, of course.) and then post the drawings around the room. Have student volunteers come up and describe what is going on in their pictures -- who? what? where? Or, you may have them sit in their seats and share with a partner or group of four, as you go around and listen. Leave the pictures posted for a few days, if possible, and you will notice a lot of discussion go on during the break times and after class.

Figure 4.

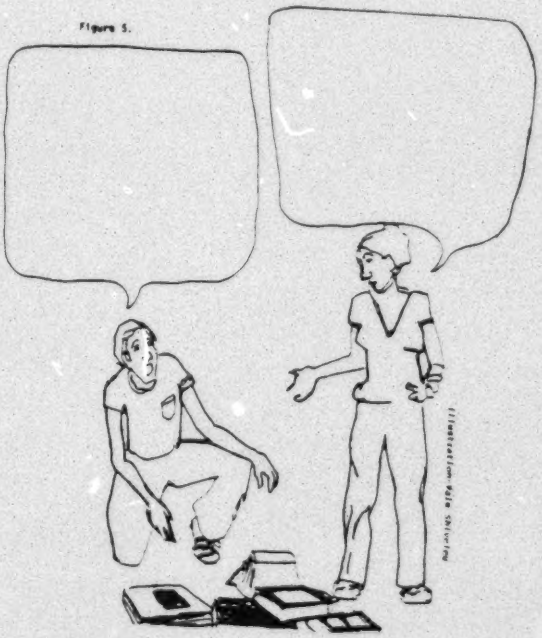
sample unfinished pictures

Cartoons

Cartoons taken from the newspaper comic strips have long been used by ESL teachers as a writing cue for their students. Three-square strips with the original dialogue "whited out" are given to individual students or pairs and they are asked to write an original dialogue. Often this activity is followed up by the students coming to the front of the class to act out their dialogues. Cartoons may be used just as effectively with non-writers, as a cue to oral practice. Give each student a copy of the same cartoon strip. Ask the whole class to brainstorm with you what they see, what the people are doing, how the people feel and what they are saying. If your students have any reading skills at all, jot down on the board anything they offer; if not, just make a mental note of the vocabulary they have used and work with it orally. I have found it best to work with cartoons in which common situations are depicted, such as an angry

woman at a meat market, a distraught man at the mechanic garage, a couple watching t.v. Recognizable situations seem to elicit the most vocabulary. Another criterion for successful use of cartoons, is that the subjects portrayed must be very obviously expressing some sort of emotion -- anger, shock, sadness, hilarity, confusion. For some reason, this proves to be more motivating and more clear to the students.

Figure 5.



KINESTHETICS

A lot of research has been done in the last eight years regarding the importance of physical involvement in language learning. I'm thinking especially of the Total Physical Response Approach (Asher), Live Action English (Romijn/Seeley), Jazz Chants (Graham). The proven success of these techniques is truly phenomenal. The theory is that linguistic input in conjunction with body movement that reinforces the meaning or context is an extraordinary

aid to comprehension and retention. Numerous articles have been written on these techniques; I will not detail them here. Rather, I will share two very simple types of kinesthetic reinforcement activities that have worked well in my classes.

Fashion Show

Go to the cheapest flea market or rummage shop in town. Spend two or three dollars for a large pile of crazy, old clothes. Get your class to dress up (over their own clothes) and do a fashion show for each other or for the other classes. For the man in the yellow gloves, the blue-striped shirt, purple sock and green tie, ask the class, "What's he wearing?" "Where's he going?" "Where does he work?" This is a delightful, highly motivating way to practice articles of clothing, colors, occupations, places, etc. [1] If you can, take pictures or slides for a review later!

What's in the bag?

Bring five or six paper bags to school with a wide variety of contents. Have a volunteer student come to the front of the class, put his/her hand in a bag and describe its contents without looking or telling what it is. "It's hard and smooth." "I can bend it." "It feels slippery." "It's not very big." Put things of varied size, texture, and consistency such as a scouring pad, a hairbrush, uncooked spaghetti, grapes, unpopped corn, or cotton balls. As you can imagine, this activity generates a lot of language -- not only on the part of the person describing, but by the guessers as well.[2]

AUDITORY

Here are three activities that will appeal to your "listeners."

Sound Effects

Take a half hour someday in your home and make a tape of common sounds in your household, such as the teapot boiling, water running in the sink, stirring a cup of tea, rattling the newspaper as you read it, opening and closing

[1] Thank you to Gayle Rank, Watsonville Adult School, for this idea.

[2] Thank you to Peggy Miles, Santa Cruz Adult School for this idea.

a squeaky door, putting silverware in the drawer, pouring a cup of coffee, the vacuum cleaner, the typewriter, the toilet flushing, the clock ticking and the sound of the alarm going off. Play parts of this tape for your students and ask them to say anything at all. What do they hear? You will obtain a large collection of nouns (cup, sink, typewriter, door), verbs (pouring, cooking, washing, reading), and adjectives (hot, cold, tired, lazy, early, thirsty). Use this feedback to create a story sequence to be acted out or just talked about. Try having them make a picture (for your visual students) of what they are hearing.[3]

Records

Bring specially selected instrumental pieces to class, choosing from the classics, jazz, rock and roll, bluegrass. Play some music for your students; ask them to tell you what is going on. What do they think of with this music? What do they see, imagine, feel, hear? Make a story together.

Paralanguage

Center a few lessons around the paralanguage -- the sounds we make that communicate certain emotions or attitudes -- as speakers of English. Sounds such as "oooops!" "Uh oh...." "Ah Hah!" "mmmmmmmmm" "Tsk Tsk Tsk!" Attach these sounds to appropriate verbal expressions and teach them in some sort of context or short dialogue.

"Oooooooops!"

"Uh oh.....What happened?"

"I spilled my tea! Ouch! That's hot!"

"Tsk! Can't you be more careful?"

I have come up with more than twenty paralinguistic items, including "Wow!" "Uh huh." "Humphf!" "Hah!" "Huh-uh." "sigh," etc. How many can you think of?

GUSTATORY

Yes, there are activities that involve the sense of taste and help to develop language. Try bringing a selection of inexpensive, nonmessy food items to class. Give everyone a paper towel and hand out handfuls of such things as corn nuts (hard, crunchy, salty), miniature marshmallows (soft, sweet, chewey), lemon slices (sour, juicy), chocolate chips (sweet, creamy, delicious), Cheerios (crunchy, sweet), etc. Use this time to practice such items as "How does it taste?" "Does it taste good?" "Bad?" "Terrible?" "Delicious?" "Do you like it?" It tastes _____.

A variation on this is the student pot-luck. Everybody brings something made from a native recipe to share. Learn language and enjoy your lunch at the same time. Talk will vary from "What's in it?" to "How do you make it?" to "Hey, this is great!" to "Let's do this every week!"

OLFACTORY

Learn language with our noses? Why not. Get on the bus and take your students to the nearest herb shop or health food store. Give them a tour through the herbs and spices and condiments. Have them describe for you the smells, the possible uses of these things. Ask them if they use these teas or leaves or seeds in their country. Ask if there are any herbs or spices that they use daily in their country but that they are unable to locate here.

You might also bring to class several things taken from your kitchen or medicine cabinet for an olfactory experience for your students. Bring onions, garlic, cinnamon, peppermint tea, rubbing alcohol, vitamin B (phew!) or brewers' yeast, incense, lotions, Ben-Gay ointment, shampoo, etc. Practice such things as "Does it smell good?" "bad?" "awful?" "sweet?" "How does it smell?" "Do you like that smell?" "Do you eat/use this?" "What kind do you use?" "Why?"

These ideas that I have shared with you are by no means meant to be core activities in your class syllabus. They are supplementary strategies designed to meet your students in the place where they learn best. They are intended to add "spice," if you will, or memorable experiences to your class hours. I hope the few ideas in this paper will stimulate your own creative resources as a teacher so that new ideas will begin to evolve and grow, and a new dimension will be added to your class presentations.

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